



**NORTHCENTRAL UNIVERSITY
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Student: **Michael Higley-Vance**

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EL7008-8

Dr. Linda Collins

Online Learning Communities

**Activity #2: e-Learning Implementation
Challenges**

Comments:

Faculty Use Only

Hi, Michael, you point out that being able to adapt in the e-learning environment is a key element for success and is a major shift from the traditional teaching environment, I so agree. Understanding and addressing various student learning styles is an important part of this. You discuss the importance of informing students about the online learning environment and that it is not easy it is just different. Major strides have been taken over the past couple of years to embrace the development of online learning

communities to further communication and a cohesive environment. Do you feel this is becoming more widespread and assisting with student success? You also discuss evaluating student experiences in the e-learning environment, this is important to help both the instructor, the student, and decision-making when revising course materials. Great comment about using the tool to aid the student and not to use the tool as something they need to learn. Dr. Collins

Dr. Linda D. Collins 6.9 3 April 25, 2014

Student and Instructor Challenges to Effective e-Learning Implementation

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Student and Instructor Challenges to Effective e-Learning Implementation

The rapid growth of technology-assisted and Web-based learning tools has a strong influence on new and developing approaches to teaching and learning (Wheeler, Kelly, & Gale, 2005). The benefits of e-learning is the speed and distance in which online learning communities are able to send and receive information. Grounded theories in e-learning describe how students and instructors interact, teach, and learn but often fail to address the implementation of technology-assisted learning tools associated with online learning environments (Barnett, McPherson, & Sandieson, 2013; Hrastinski, 2008). The need for solutions comes from the rapid development of technology use in online learning environments and the challenges those developments have on students and instructors. The purpose of this paper is to identify key challenges related to the implementation of e-learning technologies and provide ways to effectively increase student and instructor use.

e-Learning

E-learning takes place through any form of electronic means and is composed of learners, instructors, and activities presented within the learning environment. Online learning refers to learning opportunities, which take place in a virtual space and include interacting with an instructor, other learners, and being actively engaged in learning tasks via the Internet from

anywhere in the world (Allen, Seaman, & Sloan, 2011; Tunks, 2012). Online use has changed drastically over the last twenty years and in that time has provided new teaching and learning approaches to education. According to statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau (2009), 76.8% of households in the U.S have access to the Internet.

An effective e-learning environment incorporates both asynchronous and synchronous interactions (Palloff & Pratt, 2003; Wheeler, Kelly, & Gale, 2005) typically supported by technology-assisted Web 2.0 tools and resources (Tunks, 2012; Wheeler, Kelly, & Gale, 2005). Teaching and learning online happens differently than in the traditional classroom and can present challenges to students and instructors new to the e-learning processes because of a lack of knowledge or comfort level using these supportive resources (Palloff & Pratt, 2003; Tunks, 2012; Urban-Woldron, 2013). Technology-assisted online learning tools, which include Web 2.0 tools and resources, drive how teaching and learning happen online. Effective teaching and learning happens when both the student and instructor are using these resources efficiently (Barnett, McPherson, & Sandieson, 2013; Palloff & Pratt, 2003). Therefore, participant roles e-learning must be addressed when identifying and discussing the effective use of technology-assisted and Web-based learning tools online – the student, instructor, and scholar. The roles of the student and instructor will be discussed below for the purposes of this paper.

Emerging Technology

Not all change is necessary but in a world where technology is constantly emerging, it is to the advantage of the e-learning community to learn how to adapt (Brindley, Walti, & Zawacki-Richter, 2008). Access to essential technology-assisted online learning tools continue to transform the world of distance learning from an environment of sending and receiving asynchronous communication to an age of instant and synchronous interactions (Brindley, Walti,

& Zawacki-Richter, 2008; Tunks, 2012; Urban-Woldron, 2013). Advances in mobile devices, such as the cell phone and mini computer, have expanded these interactions for both students and instructors. As such, the e-learning community will continue to grow as advances in technology continue to shape education, making this the preferred learning method (Barnett, McPherson, & Sandieson, 2013; Hrastinski, 2008; Wheeler, Kelly, & Gale, 2005).

Learning Processes

Adapting to a new teaching and learning pedagogy is a major shift for educational institutions and a change for students familiar with traditional approaches to teaching (Barnett, McPherson, & Sandieson, 2013; Brindley, Walti, & Zawacki-Richter, 2008; Wheeler, Kelly, & Gale, 2005). Understanding the process of online teaching and learning is a good place to start when addressing the importance of assisted technology use in online learning environments. Understanding learning styles can aid instructors and students in online teaching and learning, providing students with greater opportunities for success online (Barnett, McPherson, & Sandieson, 2013).

The use of a constructivist approach in an online setting can help to avoid the traditional student-teacher relationship, thereby, advancing the development of critical thinking skills that can be difficult to achieve in a traditional classroom (Barnett, McPherson, & Sandieson, 2013). Much of online instruction happens through learning portals; which include, asynchronous discussion boards, email communication, passive reading assignments, and additional student found learning resources. Given these limitations, learning online requires students to be actively engaged in their own learning through mostly asynchronous means (Barnett, McPherson, & Sandieson, 2013). The challenge for online instructors is to create a learning

environment where blended learning happens while meeting the various learning styles (Palloff & Pratt, 2001; Allen, Seaman, & Sloan, 2011; Tunks, 2012). Meeting the learning needs of so many different learning styles can be achieved through the effective use of technology-assisted tools and resources (Taylor & Holley, 2009; Terrell, 2005). The challenge for students is acknowledging a level of technology literacy needed to be successful in the online learning environment and making personal educational decisions based on this information (Hrastinski, 2008; Westjohn, Arnold, Magnusson, Zdravkovic, & Zhou, 2009).

Student Considerations

Students who learn best in a virtual learning environment are self-motivated and accept personal responsibility for their learning (Parasuraman, 2000; Westjohn et al., 2009; Wheeler, Kelly, & Gale, 2005). A successful online student should be comfortable with technology-assisted Web-based tools and its uses for teaching and learning online. Web-based tools allow students to communicate easily online. Students should be able to communicate effectively using Web-based learning resources such as email, Skype, online presentation resources, and discussion boards. Students who struggle using these resources and other Web-based tools will have trouble succeeding in an online learning environment (Palloff & Pratt, 2001; Parasuraman, 2000; Tunks, 2012).

According to Tunks (2012) as the number of Web 2.0 tools increases, the technical skill required to use them decreases allowing students to concentrate more on the content rather than learning how to use the tool. The application of Web-based resources results in a thriving online classroom that supports successful student learning (Tunks, 2012). Online students must understand that online learning is not easy and requires a level of technology literacy to be

successful. Here are a few tips Palloff and Pratt (2001) recommend students consider before deciding to participate in an online course:

- Identify the learning outcomes;
- Ask yourself how much technology is actually needed to meet the learning outcomes;
- Focus on the learning experience.

Instructor Considerations

The challenge for online instructors is to find a balance between teaching pedagogy and using the latest Web-based tools that will positively support learner engagement and student performance outcomes (Tunks, 2012). For many online instructors the type of pedagogy used may differ significantly from traditional teaching practices and vary greatly from one institution to another (Allen, Seaman, & Sloan, 2011). According to Allen, Seaman, and Sloan (2011) the rapid growth of online courses and supporting technologies has increased the need for instructors to become skilled practitioners of online education. This includes understanding not only the learning processes of online education but also how to use the technology-assisted tools and Web-based resources available to students (Brindley, Walti, & Zawacki-Richter, 2008; Parasuraman, 2000). These resources help students and instructors communicate and ultimately demonstrate student mastery of online course learning objectives. Much of an instructors' successful teaching, depends on the pedagogy, technical skill, and online presence maintained in the virtual learning environment (Palloff & Pratt, 2001) . Here are a few tips Palloff and Pratt (2001) recommend instructors consider during online course instruction:

- Build a sense of community through the use of Web-based tools;

- Promote collaborative learning experiences by using supporting Web 2.0 tools and resources;
- Evaluate the learning experience student have and the outcomes demonstrated through technology assisted tools and resources and not the ability to use the tool.

Online Readiness

A major challenge facing educational institutions is understanding why some online students and instructors are not comfortable using supportive Web-based tools and resources (Westjohn et al., 2009). An initial step in addressing this challenge is to conduct an e-learning readiness assessment focused on the attitudes one has about using new technologies for teaching and learning. A technology readiness assessment, designed to determine the skills and knowledge of potential online students and instructors, is one way to determine the probable success each will have in an online learning environment (Parasuraman, 2000; Westjohn et al., 2009). According to Westjohn et al. (2009) technology readiness is an individual's predisposition to the use of new technologies for demonstrating online educational goals and learning objectives. This construct can be considered the online participant's overall state of mind resulting in a supporting or inhibiting attitude that collectively determines a person's predisposition to use new technologies (Parasuraman, 2000).

According to Parasuraman (2000) an effective online or technology readiness tool measures four dimensions of readiness: optimism, innovativeness, discomfort, and insecurity. Each dimension measures a certain belief, feeling, or understanding about technology use online (Parasuraman, 2000). Potential online students should consider participating in an online learning readiness survey to help them determine if online education is right for them. Many colleges and universities now offer various forms of readiness surveys to help potential students

and instructors determine if online learning and teaching is best suited for their learning and teaching styles. Additionally, these assessments help provide insight on course expectations, learning goals, and performance outcomes to be reached for successful online course completion.

Some schools provide readiness tools to determine a student or instructor's readiness to learn or teach online. For example, The University of Georgia offers, among other universities, a student online readiness tool called SORT, which presents potential students with an extensive survey covering technology experience, accessing online tools, study habits, lifestyle, goals, and learning preferences (Schrum, 2003). Once completed the student is presented with a comprehensive summary of the results indicating the student's overall readiness for online learning. Another institution using an online readiness tool is The University of Missouri-Kansas City, which presents potential students with statements to which they agree or disagree pertaining to technology and its use for online education (Williams, n.d.) Finally, other organizations like the Ohio Department of Education offers local school districts and higher educational institutions with a technology readiness tool called TRT. The state's goal in providing this tool is its first step in preparing for statewide computer-based assessments. In this instance the readiness tool measures a school district's ability to support and maintain and state-wide testing initiative as opposed to the readiness of learning online.

Conclusion

E-learning presents students and instructors with several challenges, which must be addressed to successfully participate in an online learning environment. Online learning is constantly changing and has become a significant part of higher education. Even traditional K-12 learning communities are beginning to develop an online learning presence because of the rapid growth of supportive Web-based teaching and learning tools. Online learning and teaching

requires sound pedagogy, motivation, and technology proficiency to be successful. As students, instructors, and technology advance, so too will online learning. Finally, students and instructors must realize his or her potential readiness for online learning and technology use. This paper has examined the challenges associated with e-learning implementation by identifying the importance of emerging technologies, considering the role of the student and instructor in an online learning community, and identifying ways to assess a student's online ore technology readiness for e-learning.

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